

**JPR 365H - Global Religion and Politics  
University of Toronto  
Syllabus - Winter 2024**



**Mon. 3-5: Sidney Smith 2106**

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**THEMES:**

This course will engage with contemporary debates on religion and politics in a post-9/11 world, and focus on understanding the evolving relationship between religion and politics at a global level. While it is difficult to draw clear distinctions between national and global trends in our globalized world, this course will explore the key issues driving the global politics of religion today. If secularism entails various modes of the political and administrative **management** of religion (rather than a simple 'separation' of spheres), we need to investigate firstly the ways in which transnational and globalized religion relate to the propositions of secularism, democracy and liberalism. How should we think about the relation between religion and politics beyond the state? What sorts of political effects have transnational religions had in various parts of the world, and how can we account for a range of outcomes? We will critically engage with the ways in which definitions of religion are deployed in various foreign policies and multilateral bodies,

and what these assumptions afford or reject politically. We will study the rise of conspiracy thinking as it relates to challenges facing the global community: the COVID pandemic, the climate crisis, the global rise of neo-fascist movements around the world, and the political intersections or solidarities being developed amongst different faiths on issues of global political concern. The emphasis will be on evangelical Christianity and radical reformist Islam in particular, as the two most successful and rapidly growing forms of religiosity on the planet, especially in developing global political projects or paradigms. Some of the readings will speak to such themes in theoretical terms; others will have a more empirical focus. Readings will be complemented by student-led research into current stories and issues found in the media and online, from both primary and secondary sources – investigative articles, blogs, videos, podcasts, public speeches, films, radio shows etc. that exemplify, dramatize or illustrate the themes and issues.

JPR 365 is jointly offered by the departments of Political Science and Religion, and will draw students from both areas, in addition to some who are enrolled primarily in other programs. All are welcome, though students registered in the class should be prepared for a multidisciplinary approach.

## **REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **READING THE QUERCUS ANNOUNCEMENTS AS THEY COME IN:** This is in caps because it has come to my attention that students don't read the Announcements, and thus miss crucial information. Do yourself a favour, and keep up with them, because they often contain important information of a substantive rather than 'housekeeping' nature, and are mostly 'good news.'
2. **Reading:** Careful and critical reading of the assigned materials before class is essential. You will not be able to follow the lecture or participate in discussions without a good understanding of the required readings. Please have your reading materials with you on the day they will be discussed.
3. **Participation:** I realize many of you will likely miss classes due to COVID and other illness, and so there is no attendance grade for the course. Participation will be based on your engagement with the readings, which you can do by raising questions, sharing your knowledge and views with other class members and actively participating in class discussion, or by sharing them on the Discussion forum on Quercus. Discussion will focus on the week's postings, and students should be ready to ask questions, be involved in discussion, and engage with the materials. For those unable or uncomfortable with the live participation format, there is a Blog set up on Quercus where you can post your ideas and reflections.

This is an informal and easy part of your grade: Your interventions on the Discussion forum can include brief reflections, links to media resources, or simply raising a question. I will be grading this at the end of the semester, and so you can add to the Discussion

forum on the week's topic after the fact. You aren't expected to do more than 5 written posts to the thread over the semester, but you're welcome to do more if you like. If you regularly speak up in class, you don't need to participate in the forum.

4. **Response Papers – 2 short papers 500-750 words/2-3 pages double-spaced. 40%- 1 selected from Weeks 1- 7, the other Weeks 8- 12.** Each of you is responsible for submitting two very short papers, each of them a critical reflection and expansion on one of the readings. You'll find **an event, image, artifact, selection of text, media report, YouTube or Social Media post etc. that you will use one of the readings to explore, illuminate, criticize or reflect on such that you show us that you can take the theoretical points made in the reading, and deploy them critically to make sense of a given empirical event, issue or problem** - this could involve taking the theoretical or analytical claim you're interested in exploring further, and applying your chosen event or artifact in such a way as to criticize the claims in the reading, reveal how the claims give us a new perspective on the event, artifact etc. in question, use the reading to criticize 'main-stream' or received ideas on the issue, or some combination of those. More instructions will be given in class.

**It's very important to be focused.** The first paper should select readings/themes from the first 6 weeks of class, the second from the second 6 weeks. **You should use at least one of these reflections as an early exploration of the topic you'd like to develop for your final paper.** You may submit them at any time up during each period. Please be sure to have your first one in **by the end of Week 7.** Be sure to critically engage with the material, not simply sum up the reading. As short as they might seem, each paper is meant to be a coherent and elegant piece of writing. They will be graded on the quality of the writing and critical engagement. You can find Sample Reflections posted on Quercus so you know what a successful response looks like.

5. **Final Research Essay Proposal- 10% - PLEASE have it in before the end of Week 10, so we can help you work on it.**

A Thesis Statement and Paper Outline of no more than 500 words accompanied by an Annotated Bibliography (3-4 sentences per work max) including **at least 6 academic** articles or books. (The annotations are not included in the 500 word count) Developing a topic that is FOCUSED and limited enough in scope to be executed successfully in the space is hard, but the teaching team is here to help you through it.

6. **Final Research Essay: 3,000-3,500 words, or 12-15 pp. 40% - Due April 8**

Students will write a research-based paper investigating one of the issues or topics covered during the term, giving you the opportunity for exploring it in more depth, or a related topic, Students are expected to develop their own essay topics. Essays may either be predominantly theoretical or empirical and they may focus on one particular setting (country, region, institution), event or issue or compare two or three – though it is important to keep the topic focused and manageable. More detailed instructions will be

posted on Quercus and discussed before Reading Week. Essays will be no more than 3,500 words, or 12-15 pp double-spaced.

## **COURSE STRUCTURE AND POLICIES:**

**Learning:** This is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year course, so students should be ready to **take active responsibility for their own learning**. My pedagogical approach is one of learning facilitation, rather than the imparting of wisdom from on high – activating the sufficient power of your own intelligence, knowledge and experience. The more active a role you take in the course, through reading, discussion, writing, research, reflection and questioning, the more you'll get out of it and the better you do. Seeking an A is good, but far better is seeking to learn and deploy your curiosity. Aiming at A's isn't always the best way to get them – aiming to learn and engage are more likely to get you the grade you want. The instructional team is happy to meet you during "Student Hours" to discuss aspects of the course content, questions, assignments which you would like clarification or further discussion.

**Office Hours/"Student Hours":** I don't have "office hours." I have "student hours." Student hours are a block of time set aside for me to assist students with their needs. Students may also schedule an appointment via e-mail if they can't make the week's office hour session. I don't keep a fixed day for them, firstly because some students would never be able to attend, but also because I'm involved in too many activities here, and I have meetings whose scheduling is a week to week affair. I will hold hours every week, and the times/days will change weekly. Students do not need to have a fully formed question or concern to use my student hours: they are free for students to use as they see fit.

Many students are under the mistaken impression that they should use student hours **after** something has gone wrong in the course, or if they have a sudden problem: this is not true. Students are encouraged attend office hours for any reason related to this class, or the course of their education at U of T. My student hours are for students to use to support their success in this class and at U of T more broadly. Please use my student hours! I will be lonely if not.

**Late Work:** This course **has no penalties for late work**. Deadlines are negotiable, as you are all grownups who best know how to manage your time. **However, you're expected to reach out to the instructor if you need more time for your assignment for whatever reason**. We understand how difficult these times are, and we are all willing to accommodate students as much as possible.

### **Academic Integrity:**

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be dealt with accordingly. Students must read "Tips for Avoiding Academic Misconduct" <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students/avoid-misconduct/tips-for-avoiding-academic-misconduct> and the University's "How not to Plagiarize" document, <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize> and are encouraged to discuss with the instructors if they are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism or

academic dishonesty. Plagiarism not only applies to essays, but also more informal forms of writing.

Use of generative AI, such as ChatGPT for your written work is **STRICTLY FORBIDDEN**. Students who use it for any of the writing assignments in this course will be sanctioned under the rules of Academic Misconduct.

### **Submitting Assignments:**

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Ouriginal for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Ouriginal reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Ouriginal service are described on the Ouriginal web site.

Students have the right to refuse to use Ouriginal. In this case, students will be expected to submit an electronic copy of their essay to the professor by email, accompanied by their outline, thesis statement and annotated bibliography, as well all their notes and rough drafts.

### **SUBMITTING TERM WORK:**

You should ensure that you have a hard copy and an electronic copy of all work submitted, and you are strongly advised to retain the rough work, notes, and draft material that went into the essay or assignment. Again, students have the right to refuse to use Ouriginal. In this case, students will be expected to submit a copy of their work accompanied by their notes and rough drafts.

### **Evaluation:**

Participation	10%
Reflection Papers (2 papers per term)	40%
Final Essay Outline	10%
Final Essay	40%

### **ESSAY WRITING:**

Clear, well-organized, and articulate writing is an indispensable feature of the analytical process, and this course assumes that you are prepared to work on improving your capacity to

communicate in prose. Please consult the “Writing at U of T” link [www.utoronto.ca/writing](http://www.utoronto.ca/writing) to access a wide array of university-wide resources. Each college also has a writing workshop, and I will be available during my office hours for consultation on any part of the essay-writing process.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will not be tolerated. Trust your own ability to think and write, and use this course as an opportunity to refine your skills.

### **MEDIA RESOURCES:**

Given the contemporary and pressing nature of the issues covered in this course, you will find frequent references to, discussion and illustrations of them in a variety of media – academic and quasi-academic blogs, mainstream investigative journalism and news media, as well as media produced by religious organizations, lobbyists, partisan political groups, talk radio hosts, think tanks, activists and advocates of all stripes.

An excellent academic resource is the extremely exhaustive and topical blog on religion and politics by American Social Science Research Council - [The Immanent Frame](#)

You should consult national dailies, global news outlets services such as the BBC World Service, Al Jazeera, CNN, MSNBC, FOX for news reports. There are many good investigative articles in publications such as The Economist, The New Republic, Harpers, The Atlantic, The New Yorker, The New Statesman, The Wall Street Journal. Liberal or left liberal political commentary: Politico.com, Salon.com, Democracy Now, Alternet. The Intercept, Talk2Action etc. Right or far right: Fox News, World Net Daily, Breitbart Media, Gateway Pundit; far-right watchdogs – Right Wing Watch, Media Matters for America, Southern Poverty Law Centre. More sources, including faith-based media outlets will be posted on Quercus.

### **REQUIRED READING LIST:**

All reading listed under each week is required reading. I will often post supplementary readings that students may consult if they're interested in delving further, but they are optional. Content is subject to modification. You can find all the course readings posted each week on Quercus.